3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175 "guilty." Theft, for instance, brought many Gullahs before disciplinary
795 tribunals. Of course slaves did steal for consumptive purposes, obviously
794 because provisions were often insufficient and monotonous. To keep cot-
•685 ton at maximum yield, planters sacrificed cultivation of food staples for their workers. Provision acreage was not determined by the slave community's size, but by the numbers of food-acres workers could attend while working cotton. Sam Mitchell, a former bondsman on one of John Chaplin's Ladies Island plantations, considered his master one of the more tolerable slaveholders. Yet Mitchell recalled that slaves received only a weekly peck of corn except at potato-digging time when they also received potatoes. Sam Polite, of John Fripp's plantation on St. Helena Island, also remembered a grim picture of subsistence:

> On Sattiday night every slabe dat wuks gits peck of corn and pea, and sometimes meat and clabber. You nebber see any sugar, neider coffee in slabery. You has straw in your mattress but dey gib you blanket. Ebery year in Christmas month you gits fur or eider fibe yaa'd cloth. . . . You wears hit winter en summer, Sunday en ebery day. You don't git no coat.[33]

175 Understandably, Gullahs felt no particular bond toward a "Thou shalt
685 not steal" edict despite supposed spiritual and assured physical reprisals.
673 Certainly the Gullahs realized the sham of such dictates given their pe-
181 culiar circumstances and oppression. Still Gullahs were not immoral on the subject of theft. Among themselves they took a serious attitude toward theft, considering it a breach of trust. Yet Gullahs felt no compunction about such acts directed toward the slave system. In the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission Interviews, conducted in 1863, Robert Smalls and Harry McMillan, two soldiers, Sea Island residents and former bondsmen, explained the slaves' attitude toward theft. They testified that while the majority of Gullahs stole from their masters and deceived them, these slaves would not steal from each other and were truthful in their dealings with one another. During the Civil War a white officer of the First South Carolina Volunteers told Charlotte Forten, a black Northerner, that he never saw a regiment where men were so honest. "In many camps the colonel and the rest of us would find it necessary to place a guard before our tents. We never do it here," he said. "They are left entirely unguarded. Yet nothing has ever been touched." Similarly, Laura M. Towne wrote in her diary: "The men and women come crowding here at all times begging to be allowed to buy clothing,

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

175 685 673 181

and though they stand about for hours in the sun, we have never missed the slightest thing."[56]

In the benne seed ritual, Gullahs dealt with theft in a spiritual context, under the guise of the Baptist faith. But the moral judgment was the opposite of Christianity. "Sin" was not upon the slave who stole from the master, but the individual who "divulged" the act. Gullahs possessed a keen sense of communal morality which, in this regard, was not subverted by dogmatic features of Christianity. While stealing from "Maussa," was a sin, it was wrong—that is, against elements of collective interests and values—to steal from a fellow slave and hence betray community confidence. Gullahs extended their moral philosophy further than race or condition however, by refusing to steal from whites simply because they were white. But, the Gullahs were not naive. Their shrewd analysis of justice helped them distinguish between friend and oppressor even among white Northern "missionaries." And some white Northern Baptist ministers sent to the Sea Islands during the Port Royal experiment were more avaricious than cotton agents. One Reverend Phillips, on full salary from a missionary organization, also drew a salary from the government as a superintendant of plantations, and was provided with "house-rent and rations." Still, Phillips "demanded," from St. Helena Island Gullahs, "half-a-dollar from every church member for the half year ending January 1." Since some one thousand blacks on St. Helena, claimed membership in Brick Baptist Church, Phillips expected to collect quite a sum. But the Gullahs refused to pay. Other ministers "of like kidney" were dismissed for "lying" and for "stealing" contributions sent to the Gullahs by Northern congregations. On one occasion, Gullahs discovered that James McCrea, a minister representing the American Missionary Association was cheating them. They refused to attend McCrea's religious meetings and refused to labor in the cotton fields he supervised. Likewise, when some government cotton agents on St. Helena charged over 100 percent more for store items than was being charged in Beaufort, these stores were broken into "and robbed of a good deal of clothing."[57]

175 685 673 797 181 794

175 797 794 181

Flight, another problem continually plaguing Sea Island slaveholders and punished by both church and state, was usually provoked by some extreme act of cruelty, or gross injustice. Sometimes slaves left because of a strong desire to visit a loved one. Gullahs rarely ran away with intentions of "going North" for instance. Aside from the near impossi-

17 567 181

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

975
113
567

BC. A good example of how little attention some masters paid to slaves is provided in the T. B. Chaplin Journal, edited by Theodore Rosengarten. Chaplin probably spent more time supervising his property than most Sea Island planters. However Rosengarten writes: "Because Chaplin had very little to do with his slaves outside of work, we seldom see them in their quarters and only then when peace is disturbed." T. B. Chaplin was on the Episcopalian side of the family and "appears to have invested nothing in the spiritual welfare of his slaves." Some of his slaves did join the Island Baptist church through the "praise house." Rosengarten, *Tombee*, 145, 147, 151.

[975]
[794]

46. *Minutes, Savannah River Baptist Association*, November 25, 1854, November 23, 1855, BC; *Minutes, Beaufort Baptist Church*, June 10, 1843, 61–62, September 4, 1852, 171, September 12, 1854, 197, November 7, 1857, 241–42, BC; Rosengarten, *Tombee*, 147; Pierce Butler to A. Marvin, March 19, 1839, Letterbook, 1838–1840, box 38, Wistar, Papers, Butler Section, HSP.

975
113

47. James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Church Discipline: An Historical Introduction to the Practices of Baptist Churches, with Particular Attention to the Summary of Church Discipline Adopted in 1773 by the Charleston Association* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 3–4, 10–18, 28; King, *South Carolina Baptists*, 62–63. The Baptist religion as it developed in the Lowcountry from Georgetown southward to the Beaufort District was considerably different from that planted in the upcountry. The latter was closer to the frontier Baptist tradition. Unlike "Regular" Baptists of the Lowcountry, the "frontier theology" was a compromise of Arminian and Calvinist views. King, *South Carolina Baptists*, 38, 148; Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 440–43.

48. Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*, 39–44; J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 100–04; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 180–81; King, *South Carolina Baptists*, 38, 148–55; Daniel W. Hollis, "The Role of the Church in South Carolina History," *Journal of the South Carolina Baptist Historical Society* 4 (November, 1978): 11–13; Smith, *In His Image, But*, Chapter 2.

975
113
793
794

49. *Minutes, Euhaw Baptist Church*, passim, SCL; *Minutes, Baptist Church at Black Creek*, 1828–1922, 15–59, SCL; Jones, "Old Black Swamp Church"; *Minutes, Beaufort Baptist Church*, October 9, 1840, 10–11, BC; For information about discipline of slaves in other churches, see Cornelius, "God's Schoolmasters," 228–40; Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry*, 48–52.

50. *Minutes, Beaufort Baptist Church*, August 12, 1843, 61–62.

51. Ibid., November 11, 1840, 12, April 5, 1852, 166, October 7, 1859, 272–73.

52. Ibid., October 8, 1840, 11, July 9, 1841, 19, July 8, 1842, 34; September 8, 1843, 63; April 5, 1855, 203–4.

53. Rawick, *American Slave, South Carolina*, II (2) 184; Allen Diary, 23, 57.

54. *Minutes, Beaufort Baptist Church*, November 9, 1844, 83, April 5, 1852, 166, October 7, 1859, 272–73, BC; *Minutes, Euhaw Baptist Church*, February 5, 1832, 11, September 1848, 75, SCL.

975
113
•685
[795]
[794]

55. Fripp Diary, 60, Beaufort Township Library; Johnson, *Social History*: 47, 54; Rawick, *American Slave, South Carolina*, III (3) 200–201, 272; Diary of William F. Allen, 62, in William F. Allen Family Papers, 1775–1937, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

56. John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 374, 381; Forten, "Sea Islands," Part I, 668; Diary of Laura M. Towne, 15, Penn School Papers, SHC.